

THE EARLY GERMAN-JEWISH SETTLERS

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The number of Jews in America on the eve of the Civil War was approximately 200,000 out of a total population of 30,000,000. About one-fifth, or 40,000 Jews, lived in New York City. Prior to the Revolution the Jewish population had been centered in New York, Newport, Rhode Island, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah. However, by 1840, this concentration of the Jewish community in the eastern coastal cities was no longer prevalent. In the decades following the Revolutionary era many Jewish pioneers migrated westward and gradually small Jewish communities developed in the West in such cities as Chicago, Cincinnati, Memphis, St. Paul, and Indianapolis. In 1824 the first synagogue in the Northwest Territory was dedicated in Cincinnati. This Westward migration of American Jewry was enacted by a new element in the Israelite community—the German Jew.

The earliest Jewish settlers in America had been of Spanish and Portuguese stock. They were mostly wealthy and cultured refugees fleeing from the Inquisition in both the old and the new world.

The German Jewish immigrants who left Europe in the years between 1820 and 1848 were largely the rank and file of the population—poor or middle class artisans, merchants, and only a rare professional man. It was not until after the Revolutions of 1848, that many of the more wealthy and educated Jews, some of whom had taken part in these movements, joined the flow of immigration to America (actually most of these were forced to flee for their lives). In the earlier period the Jews fled from central Europe under the pressure of the medieval anti-Jewish laws which were again revived with increased vigor during the reaction following the Napoleonic period. The largest group came from Bavaria where the anti-Jewish laws were the most severe. After the Revolutions of 1848, the brutal retaliations added further cause for German Jewish flight from the continent.

Thus, in most cases the German Jew at first came to the frontier as peddlers, carrying their packs on their shoulders to distant dwellings, to farmhouses and to remote villages and opening up many a new region to trade. Usually, they were eagerly awaited, and warmly received by the farmer and his family, for the coming of the peddler offered a welcome break in the dull monotony of backwoods life.

Their first meager earnings were utilized for passage money to bring over oppressed relatives from Germany, Austria, and Hungary. America became the "mirage in the desert" for the persecuted Jews of Central Europe. One Jewish poet writing in 1848 exclaimed:

"O think of it, and hurry to join our group,  
Hurry to America's shore,  
Hurry, to salute the country of liberty  
The free land in the wilderness.  
There exists no prejudice, no hate, no envy,  
No Hangman lives there and no Tyrant.  
The sunrise of a better world shines there.  
For your own sake, O Brothers, think of it always."  
The peddler who began business by carying his pack,

graduated to a horse and wagon, and some eventually established themselves in a new community which offered a favorable site for a store or trading post.

But, not all German Jews became traders and merchants. A good number had been mechanics and artisans in Europe and hence resumed such occupations upon arriving in America. Some of these Jewish workers played

an active role in the labor movement in the fifties.

Throughout the years preceeding the Civil War there were many attempts to unite the scattered Jewish communities in America. But, obstacles existed to the effecting of such a union. The German Jews tended to retain their native German language both in their homes and in public gatherings and this acted as a barrier between them and the old Spanish and Portuguese Jews. Also, the religious differences between the Orthodox and Reform congregations obstructed every attempt to secure unity.

However, events occuring abroad were instrumental in achieving a closer union of the American Jews despite the above mentioned difficulties. In 1840, Jews in the United States met together to protest the seizure and torture of 13 Jews in Damascus on the charge of having put a Christian monk and his servant to death for the purpose of using their blood for baking matsoth (bread) for Passover. These gatherings were the initial actions in the establishment of a national body to speak for the Jews in America.

In 1859, a five year old Jewish boy, Edgar Mortara, in Bologna, Italy, who had been secretly baptized years before by his nursemaid, was, under a Papal order, removed from his home under the protest of his Jewish parents, and placed in a Catholic school. A wave of international disapproval emanating from both Christian and Jew resulted. Protests poured into the Vatican, but with no avail. Under the impact of this affair and a subsequent re-enactment of the numerous meetings of protest and discussion, the movement toward a union of American Jewry culminated in the formation of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in 1859. Henceforth, the leaders of the Jewish community could point out that "the two hundred thousand American Jews will not stand isolated."

The German Jewish immigrants in the first half of the nineteenth century thus became active in the daily life of the rapidly growing American nation—some pushing toward the frontier, others remaining in the cities—but always developing their Jewish culture within the American environment.

The age was an era of movement and expansion—by 1950 the Westward Movement had reached the Pacific Ocean and the mass of immigration continued; numerous industrial establishments arose; the railroad, prarie schooner, and steamboat were indicative of a people pioneering, a people on the move; the laboring class began to show signs of unrest and moved toward organization; utopian experiments sprang up in various communities. But in this world of rumbling engines and clattering wagon wheels across the praries, there existed a question which was becoming a national issue, a question over which voices grew more heated and turbulent—slavery. Could this nation exists part slave and part free? Who had to answer?



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WHITERUTHENIAN VS UKRAINIAN IN  
ANCIENT LITHUANIA

In order to keep VILTIS and its editor honest, I wish to contribute the following remarks pertaining to the article in VILTIS of Jan. 1955: "Some Facts About The Ukrainians".

The Ukrainian people, honest and virtuous by nature, are an old and singular nation. Though of Slavic race, their language and culture is not identical with that of the Russians. They are unique in the sense that this patriotic nation has never had the fortune to enjoy complete sovereignty. For centuries they were raided by the Tartars and Turks, by the armies of the rising Duchy of Moscow (Great Russians), by Lithuanians and Poles; even Swedes and French have trampled the soil of Ukraine. Despite the fact that patriotic Ukrainians declared their land independent in 1919, on the strength of President Wilson's Fourteen Points of national self-determination, the Ukraine was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. It is now completely under Soviet domination.

As of the XIII c., most of the Ukraine became a part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Since then, a lot of common interests have developed and these two nations have shared part of their history. The Ukraine's incorporation into the GD of Lithuania seemed to have been a happy one, because the Ukrainians were able to enjoy the protection from Tartar and Muscovite raids and had a great deal of cultural and religious freedom. Up to the time of Lithuania's union with Poland and the acceptance of Christianity (early XV C.), the Lithuanians were liberal rulers insofar as cultural and religious freedom of the incorporated peoples was concerned.

The first foundation of the Slavic language was laid down by St. Cyril, a 9th century missionary of the Slavs. Literacy thus stemmed from the churches in the Ukraine, too. The churches, however, were not interested in developing Ukrainian, and were content in using their own church language, which, in due time, developed its own variations relative to the regions in which it was used.

In contradiction to the statement in VILTIS that: "... The Ukrainian language had at one time even served as the official language of Lithuania ...", I wish to refer to the quotations made available through the courtesy of Mr. A. Ružancovas, a bibliographer and historian of utmost integrity, which follows:

1. Prof. V. Biržiška, Ph. d., H. C., "Senųjų Lietuvių Knygų Istorija," Vol. I, Chicago, Ill., 1953, pp. 33-34 says (Translation): "... the number of existing manuscripts from the XIV century is much larger. They were written in the Whiteruthenia church language which, at that time, was not spoken and was used only by the Orthodox church. These books were produced mostly in all the larger political centers where literate clergymen were available (at that time by far not all of the pastorate was literate, especially among the Orthodox). These books were spread from the centers not only to Whiteruthenian and Ukrainian parts of Lithuania, but also to all political centers of Lithuania, especially Vilna. There, in the patronage of the Lithuanian nobles and along with the Lithuanians of the old (pre-Christian) religion, congregated a large number of Orthodox Whiteruthenians. These books served the expanding Orthodox churches and monasteries and contributed to the literacy of Lithuania itself. The growth of the Lithuanian State and the forthcoming reforms necessitated the use of the script. It was comparatively easy to find literate priests or monks to write these various documents. Since, until the end of the XIV century, nearly all literate priests and monks of Lithuania were Orthodox of Whiteruthenian and Ukrainian origin, all state documents happened to be written in the only language known to them. Hence, an

entirely foreign language became an official State language of Lithuania for several centuries. It began to be used because of necessity, and continued to be in use later through habit and tradition. Not until 1697 did an act of the Lithuanian Assembly direct all scribes to write state documents in Polish: another foreign language to the Lithuanians ..."

2. Mr. A. Ružancovas also recalls some discussions in regard to this subject with Prof. M. K. Liubavski at the University of Moscow during the years of 1911 to 1914. Prof. M. K. Liubavski was lecturing on the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. According to Prof. M. K. Liubavski, the Orthodox church language varied, and there was a difference between the Orthodox church language in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and that of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. As an example, Prof. Liubavski used to refer to the translation of the Holy Script by Francis Skoryna which was published in Vilnius in the XVI century. The Moscow Orthodox Church considered this edition as heretical, mainly because of the differences in language. To Mr. A. Ružancovas' opinion, the Orthodox Church language of Lithuania acquired impurities of Ukrainian origin in Ukraine, and it naturally acquired impurities of Whiteruthenian origin in Whiteruthenia. Hence, both nations developed their main languages from the same origin, though none of them can be referred as the official Lithuanian state's language.

Pertaining to the same problem, it is interesting to quote a third source, this time from a Whiteruthenian source. The present day romanticism of the Whiteruthenians leads them to far reaching conclusions. I quote:

3.J. Stankevič, "Karotki načyrk historyi Kryvič-Bialarusi", "Veda", Brooklyn, April-June, 1951, pp. 88-89 (resume):

"National Character of the Great Lithuanian Principality. The period of individual tribal states was succeeded in the history of Whiteruthenia by the period of the United Whiteruthenian State, called Great Lithuanian Principality or Lithuania. Owing to the confusion created by the Russians in the realm of national names, not everybody can clearly distinguish which nation built up the Great Lithuanian Principality. Therefore the author brings forth an argument proving the Whiteruthenian character of the historical Lithuanian state. The arguments are as follows: 1. The state emblem—an armed horseman—is of Whiteruthenian origin. 2. The law code of G. L. P., the Lithuanian Statute, is of Whiteruthenian origin too, both on account of the language in which it is written and of the origin of the laws, included therein. 3. Whiteruthenian was the language spoken at the court of the Great Princes, the dynasty used it in everyday life. It was the language of the administrative offices, educated classes, literature, it was the state language through the whole state territory, regardless of nationality. During the five and a half centuries of the existence of the G. L. P., there was not a single official document nor any secular writing of private character written in the Lithuanian language. The administrative, fiscal and law terminology is also Whiteruthenian and not Lithuanian. The Lithuanian nobility used the Whiteruthenian language in political and public discussions as well as in private and family life ..."

That's that. I hope, that these few quotations will throw enough light on the subject of the language in the Great Duchy of Lithuania and will provide to each reader of VILTIS a wide choice for forming an opinion of individual selection.

I hope that these remarks will prove interesting and that you will find possible to include them in VILTIS as one of my rare contributions. I wish to express my great indebtedness to Mr. A. Ružancovas for allowing to quote him and his sources.